



Make the Connection to Your Urban Communities

The Forest Service has a long history of engaging local, rural communities in Forest Service decision-making yet often finds connecting to urban communities more daunting. However, the agency has a responsibility to reach out to urban citizens, many who use national forest system lands and others who would benefit from knowing more about the lands that are their legacy.

Engaging urban communities also helps achieve National Strategic Direction for community-based stewardship. In the Eastern Region, a unique program called Urban Connections provides the tools to reach out to these communities. Urban Connections strengthens initiatives and programs such as:

- **All Lands Approach** - Engage urban populations and political leaders in national forest issues and decision making.
- **Collaboration** - Build relationships with community activists and urban leaders to identify mutually beneficial opportunities that address Forest Service and/or urban issues.
- **Kids in the Woods** - Help achieve goals addressed in More Kids in the Woods.
- **Civil Rights** - Develop a more diverse pool of candidates for Forest Service positions.
- **Chief's Vision** - Achieve Chief Tidwell's vision for reconnecting Americans to the outdoors.

What is Urban Connections? It is an outreach approach involving State and Private Forestry, Research, and the National Forest System to better understand urban stakeholders. It brings the Forest Service message of stewardship to non-traditional and culturally diverse populations by using the urban environment as a “bridge to the forest.” Programs are actively operating in Boston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, and Detroit.

What Has the Program Achieved? The program has developed numerous key partnerships in city communities such as Keep Greater Milwaukee Beautiful, Fishing Buddies in Chicago, and the Neighborhood House in St. Paul. In addition, the program has an extensive outreach to urban youth and provides many opportunities to engage in environmental education activities.

Where is the Program Headed? Urban Connections has developed guidelines for the next five years to increase its scope through the use of “City Core Teams” that engage in programs and activities in major metropolitan areas. Goals include improving forest stewardship among urban populations and understanding better ways to reach urban audiences.

What is my Role?

- Read the Guidelines for Implementation of the Eastern Region's Urban Connections Program and determine where your unit fits in with the goals, objectives, and strategic actions.
- Share your existing urban connections with the “City Program Manager” who works in urban areas near you.
- Develop a communication strategy with your City Program Manager then begin visiting with urban leaders to learn about their concerns and explore ways to cooperate.

How can I Learn More: Visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/urbanconnections/> or contact the Urban Connections Program Manager, Daryl Pridgen, dpridgen@fs.fed.us.